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Outline of Reference Paper On:

"PARASITIC ELEMENTS" IN THE USSR

The now famous resolution on propaganda adopted January 10, 1960, by the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, demanded an unrelenting "struggle against slackers and surviving parasitical elements" in Soviet society. Indeed, denunciations of such elements have been filling the Soviet press since that resolution was first publicized. Soviet propagandists divide these "asocial" Soviet citizens into several groups. For example, there are the "gilded youth", the politically indifferent children of the privileged "New Class" who do everything possible to avoid work, especially manual labor. More important are the growing numbers of Soviet women who prefer child raising and home life to factory or collective farm work, and whom marriage often makes indifferent to political indoctrination.

An impressive amount of Soviet agriculture, cattle-raising and housing construction is now accounted for by private enterprise. So much cattle in the USSR is privately owned that economic necessity forces the government to soft-pedal its strictures on "grasping, private-owner psychology", at least in this area. The "building brigades" of young people who do construction work on a free lance basis, often at the behest of state enterprises, are now an everyday part of Soviet life. Their activity may partly explain why the Soviet housing industry has recently been moving forward out of the doldrums.

Soviet newspapers and magazines have also been throwing up their hands lately in horror over the current prevalence of private "speculation" — at middlemen, dealers in ice cream, mineral waters, and even real estate, who can afford cars and fine homes while honest Soviet bureaucrats must, of course, do without these comforts — at least so long as they remain honest... and junior.

But there seems nothing illegitimate in the enterprise shown by these Soviet "businessmen." At least they are making available to the Soviet population some consumer goods otherwise likely to be lost in the shuffle by the master minds of Gosplan (State Planning Commission). Surely their activity is morally preferable to the outright bribing conceded by the Soviet press to be a commonplace among high Soviet officials.

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"PARASITIC ELEMENTS" IN THE USSR

The resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, "On the Tasks of Party Propaganda in the Conditions of Today", (Pravda, January 10, 1960), which mentioned all the "ideological shortcomings" of Soviet society, declared that one of the many tasks demanding action in Soviet internal policy was the "struggle against slackers and surviving parasitical elements, who want to live at the expense of society without giving it anything in return." This contrasts oddly with the statement by Leonid F. Ilichev, Chief of the Propaganda Section of the Party Central Committee, that

... the assertions of bourgeois ideologists and propagandists that Socialism has not changed and cannot change the mentality of man, that man under any conditions remains an egoist and a grabber, ... that the human mind does not change, that it is that "fortress that no one can capture," ... that the Soviet man is in no essential respect different from the bourgeois, that all attempts to "Bolshevize" the Soviet people have failed-- (all these assertions) are false from beginning to end (Kommunist, 1959, No. 14).

The Soviet press itself disproves Ilichev's views. Recently it has been filled with reports of the growing prominence in Soviet society of elements of "parasitism", "sponging", "private-owner, grasping psychology", and a "non-Communist attitude to work." "Parasitic elements" are portrayed as a serious obstacle to the building of Communism.

According to Soviet propaganda, the absence of unemployment in the USSR is one of that country's great advantages over capitalist countries. In the usual sense of the word, there is indeed no unemployment in the USSR; i. e. there are no registered workers in search of work but unable to obtain it. On the other hand, there are large numbers of people who do not want to work at all, or who are working, but not in state enterprises or collectives and who, therefore, are not engaged in what is officially regarded as "socially useful work."

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This tendency to avoid "socially useful work" is assuming ominous proportions and appears in the most varied, sometimes even extreme forms. But it would be incorrect to describe this tendency as entirely "parasitical". Most of the Soviet citizens accused of this crime are, when judged by ordinary standards of conduct, leading a perfectly normal life.

-- "Asocial" Soviet Citizens Target for Press Attacks--

In the USSR, it is common to divide these "asocial" elements into several groups: first there is the group of the "idlers" and "loafers." This group, in turn, is subdivided into two categories. One sub-group is that of the "gilded youth", the children of well-to-do highly placed officials in economic administration, the Party and the government, or of people prominent in academic and cultural life. Many of these young people, not without encouragement from their parents, show an unwillingness to work, especially to do manual work. Often they refuse to study, and instead lead an idle life. Most of them are apolitical in their attitudes.

The first "asocial" group also includes a second numerically larger, and in recent times definitely growing, sub-group--- that of women--- wives and mothers who prefer staying at home to run the household and bring up their children to going out to work in a factory or on a kolkhoz (collective farm). On February 14, 1960, Komsomolskaya Pravda (Young Communist Pravda) published an article entitled "Now I Am A Housewife," which described how a Komsomol member named Masha, previously known throughout her district as its best milkmaid, had given up all work on the local kolkhoz since her marriage. "Unfortunately", observed the writer, "Masha is not the only one." On May 30, 1958, the same paper had printed a short feature item entitled "To the Sound of the Bells", which dealt with a certain Lida Vikhrova, an 18-year-old Komsomol member. . Lida had been a member of the raion (regional) committee of the Komsomol: She had been awarded a decoration and had attended a wide variety of conferences. But then she married a 20-year-old Komsomol member and gave up all her commitments, both in public work and on the kolkhoz. Now she is a housewife in a house full of icons. The Party Central Committee's resolution on propaganda urges that propaganda be stepped up among women in order to raise their "ideological level" and remove religious prejudices and such "survivals of bourgeois narrowmindedness" as the "antiquated desire to lead a domestic life.

The second group of "asocial elements" includes those infected by the "psychology of the private owner and the grasper." These are people who for the most part are very hardworking, but prefer to work for themselves and not where the Soviet authorities say they should. They include the majority of kolkhoz members, who work in the kolkhoz in a spirit of complete indifference and concentrate their main efforts on cultivating their own personal plots of land. Here the Soviet leaders are caught in a vicious circle. It is impossible to

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to improve collective farming without abolishing private farming, i. e. the cultivation of personal plots. But , on the other hand, to abolish private farming would not only be a dangerous move politically, but would have disastrous economic consequences. For example, cattle raising and dairy farming in the USSR are largely based on private ownership and cultivation of herds. As of January 1, 1959, 55.6 per cent of the cows, 41.2 per cent of the beef cattle, 31.1 per cent of the pigs and 83.6 per cent of the goats in the Soviet Union were privately owned. Between 1954 and 1959, the number of privately owned cows increased by over 3,500,000 or nearly 24 per cent (See Narodnoe Khozyaistvo SSSR , 1958 Godu: Statistichesky Sbornik, The National Economy of the USSR in 1959: A Statistical Yearbook, Moscow, 1959, pp. 447-450).

--Free Enterprise Thrives in Soviet Housing Industry--

Similar tendencies may be seen in housing construction. Throughout the country, there are many "building brigades", work teams which are nowhere registered as such, which accept private contracts for building houses and summer cottages. These brigades, which often consist of young people (sometimes Komsomol members) who have no registered work, even carry out work for kolkhozes and sovkhoses (state farms) and make handsome profits. Much space is now being given to their activities in the Soviet press. A description of their work, written by one alleged to have been engaged in it, was given in Komsomolskaya Pravda on February 11, 1960. The writer says:

After ten days, the senior (of our party) went to the sovkhos director for our pay and brought back 1,800 rubles for each of us... The "shift" lasted from six in the morning until half past eight at night. There was no one in charge of us, and no one took any interest in us. (Ibid., February 11, 1960)

As a result of the current stepped-up pace of housing construction, these brigades have evidently become a permanent part of Soviet daily life. The writer of this article also observes:

They are good craftsmen and could be of great use if they were to work in production. But how can they and those like them be made to stop engaging in seasonal work? (Ibid., February 11, 1960)

Many such "free-lance" jobmen go from house to house installing or mending television or radio sets, record players, or primus stoves. Of course they are not registered workers in such trades and are regarded by the powers that be as not taking part in "socially useful work" (Komsomolskaya Pravda, February 7, 1960).

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--Spotlight Focusses On All Non-Soviet Socialist Profits--

A third basic "asocial" group consists of so-called "parasitic elements" — people who, whether they are employed in administrative work, on kolkhozes or elsewhere, or are studying, or even are completely without an occupation, make considerable profits from commercial operations of various kinds. "Speculation" on the produce of their personal plots, "shady" deals of one kind or another, including prostitution, fall into this category.

Usually these are people who are showing a perfectly natural and healthy spirit of independent initiative, which no laws or decrees on the "strengthening of ideological work" can stamp out. A good illustration of this is provided by the article "Shalaputin and Sons" in Komsomolskaya Pravda of August 19, 1959. This article describes how a pensioned-off employee and his son-in-law, who is making a good living as an engineer, organize a kind of hotel for tourists on their private summer estate; how a seventeen-year-old Komsomol member, son of the director of a state enterprise, rides around in his father's automobile and carries on an extremely lucrative trade in automobiles; how another retired employee on a pension and his student son make and sell aids for cribbing in examinations in physics, chemistry, mathematics, literature, etc. The article states that in the USSR "there are people who try their luck in the field of private enterprise", and observes with regret that Soviet citizens show as much skill and initiative in this field as the Russian merchants of olden times.

The Soviet press records many instances in which people employed in quite modest administrative positions and officially earning no more than 500-600 rubles per month, build, buy, or sell detached houses costing 100,000 rubles and ride about in luxurious automobiles which are their own property.

Some fantastic things happen sometimes. A specialist or a highly skilled worker does not even think of acquiring a house or suburban cottage of his own— He must wait a while before he can afford such a thing; but a retailer of mineral water or ice cream has no difficulty in providing himself with a "Volga" automobile, or a forwarding agent in building a detached house (Izvestia, October 15, 1959).

A more extreme example is that of the groups of wandering students who are to be found in the more picturesque corners of the country:

These are the advocates of the free life. Expelled from various institutes, they gather around tourists' camp fires, eat their fill and talk condescendingly of living with nature. They feel sorry for these stupid tourists, these students or workers, in a word, these people who are doing something on this earth (Komsomolskaya Pravda, February 14, 1960).

--Bribery Widespread, Especially Among High Officials--

Bribery is also widespread in the USSR. Those who practice it are mostly highly-placed officials in the Party, the government or the economic administration. A phrase in the Soviet satirical journal Krokodil (1960, No. 3), "The Way To Financial Wealth Is Through Bribes", well describes what is in fact a widespread principle in Soviet society. Those who practice it are also often guilty of embezzling state funds and property.

In their attempts to deal with these "parasitical elements", the Soviet authorities appeal to various social groups:

Every trade union organization, every workers' meeting... can and must ask anyone who is obviously living beyond his earnings from what source he is increasing his personal wealth (Izvestia, October 15, 1959).

But these appeals are evidently in vain:

There is nothing more dangerous than those people who stand to one side, uninterested and indifferent, who consider that the fight against parasites, spongers and drones is not their business but that of the militia and the courts, and say that it is no concern of theirs (Krokodil, 1960, No. 3, p. 11).

The reasons for this attitude of indifference to the problem are also evident from the Soviet press. The chief reason is that it is so widespread: almost every Soviet citizen feels himself to be to some extent a "parasitic element" in the Communist sense, and so he shows worldly wisdom in pursuing a policy of "live and let live."

In the light of all this testimony, it is obviously doubtful whether the Socialist principle, "he who does not work shall not eat", is really in effect in the USSR, despite assertions by the Party leadership that this fundamental rule is in force.

We have a principle: "He who does not work shall not eat." But unfortunately, one often sees people who, while not engaged in honest work, live in clover and not merely eat, but eat the best of food (Komsomolskaya Pravda, February 3, 1960).

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--Soviet Writer Stung, Hits Munich Institute--

This also proves another point. In the first 1960 issue of the journal Problems of Peace and Socialism, published in Prague in nineteen different languages by the Communist world movement, a Soviet writer, B. Ryurikov, attacked the Munich Institute for the Study of the USSR for publishing in one of its periodicals the statement that the Soviet regime closes all opportunities for displaying personal initiative in the industrial, agricultural, commercial, and other walks of life. Ryurikov attempts to persuade his readers that the Soviet citizen could not have such a "wretched mentality" as to take the road of "personal enrichment" or "profitable commerce." However, it seems clear that in Soviet society the desire to manage one's own personal life as comfortably as possible through private initiative is a powerful socio-political factor which has thus far proved an insoluble problem for the Soviet regime.

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